



*City planners began dreaming about the construction of a Civic Center for San Diego not long after the turn of the century. The aesthetics of such a project may have originally driven affluent city leaders, but it soon developed into an administrative necessity. As the region grew, both City and County government services expanded and offices were scattered throughout downtown San Diego. Many government officials and the public-at-large believed that concentrating offices in one location would improve the efficiency of government. For about a decade, the question of whether the Civic Center would be built occupied many City and County proceedings, and even made its way in front of the voters. Timing was the project's worst enemy, with World War I and the Great Depression diverting public attention and support. But while the Depression dashed hopes of funding the project locally, it would eventually be the impetus for the Civic Center's construction, as the center became one of the largest federal projects to be built in the state of California. The completion of the Civic Center, now known as the San Diego County Administration Center, brought with it the success of creating a source of civic pride in the midst of the Depression.*

# The Era Preceding Construction

“The present outmoded and inconvenient Civic Buildings of both the City and County do not reflect the progressive sentiment of the majority of the Citizens of this County, and hinder, rather than help the development of our great agricultural, scenic and maritime resources.” – Claude Wilson, president of the Northern San Diego Chamber of Commerce, August 9, 1937.

## Conception of the dream

As early as 1902, civic leaders began voicing their desire for a building to house both City and County offices. The old City Hall on Fifth Avenue was quickly becoming too small; and the County didn't even have a main building. County Supervisors met in an old courthouse, with other offices housed in the Spreckels Theater Building on Broadway. Other offices for both the City and County were spread out throughout the downtown area. One citizen summarized the situation by complaining that “our city hall building is an old rattle-trap, dilapidated, dangerous, disgraceful; that our courthouse is utterly inadequate for the county business. We are in desperate need of a Civic Center of new modern buildings to house the greatest business of the community, our government work.”<sup>1</sup>

In 1907, a group of citizens formed the Civic Improvement Committee (later known as the Civic Center Committee) that would greatly influence public support on this project. The first president of the committee, community activist George White Marston, brought in an up-and-coming city planner from the East Coast to evaluate the situation. This planner, John Nolen, published his first evaluation of the city in 1908, which was financed almost exclusively by Marston. Nolen would later become a common reference in San Diego civic planning; his work provided the basis for numerous waterfront development proposals and provided the framework that initiated Civic Center construction.



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*An illustration from the Nolen Plan showing the Civic Center along the waterfront.*



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*George Marston (center), along with John Nolen (right) and Ed Fletcher (left).*

The plan, which called for a Civic Center in the heart of downtown San Diego, was able to capture the attention of so-called “progressive” citizens, but it failed to rally the support of the public at large. Five years later, proponents reintroduced Nolen's 1908 plan, but shifted the site to a less expensive location. This, too, failed as the public was distracted by the threat of war in Europe and the plans already underway for the 1915 Pan-Pacific Exposition. City officials held back considering this or any other plans for almost a decade.

After World War I (1914-1919), the Navy began expanding its military installations in San Diego, boosting the city's economy. This led to a revitalized interest in the Civic Center as citizens united to form a Civic Association, again headed by George Marston. At Marston's request, the ideas of the Nolen Plan were resurrected in 1923.<sup>2</sup>

Recognizing the growing interest, the Board of Supervisors passed Resolution #39993 in January 1924, which officially invited the Common Council of the City of San Diego to confer with the Supervisors to discuss the

possibility of a combined City/County building. The City agreed to appropriate \$10,000 for an updated study by Nolen. The city planner went to work again and recommended in 1926:

San Diego has needed a Civic Center for a quarter of a century or more, and should begin building it now. Such action would not merely give the city the buildings necessary for its municipal life, but would transform the civic spirit of the community, raise the civic pride of the citizens and attract favorably the attention of visitors.<sup>3</sup>

Catalyzed by the work of John Nolen, the Board of Supervisors passed a resolution in 1926, acknowledging "the necessity for the erection of a public building or buildings in said city for municipal purposes and that the public convenience requires that said City join with the County of

San Diego."<sup>4</sup> The Board believed that in consolidating two separate branches into one building, the citizens would benefit by conveniently conducting their municipal and county business in one location.

Not only would it be conveniently located, a new center would also make economic sense. Collectively, the City and County were paying annual rent of \$44,650 for the scattered government offices. If that money was used instead to help finance the construction of a Civic Center, the cost would be just \$43,000 per year. This also protected the County and City from increased costs in the form of higher rent. The rent issue served as a powerful campaign instrument for the proponents of the Civic Center plan. By 1927, official documents were circulating that referred to "the joint construction, erection and ownership of a building by the County of San Diego and the City of San Diego."<sup>5</sup>

## Examination of potential construction sites

Once the need of a combined structure was firmly established, it was time for taxpayers and the administrators to agree upon a location. Possible locations had been under discussion since 1908, when Nolen suggested the construction of the Civic Center near the Ulysses S. Grant Hotel, between "C" Street and Broadway. When Nolen originally presented his ideas to the city in 1908, the site that now houses the County Administration Center had been submerged by the harbor. It wasn't until 1914 that harbor dredging made construction a possibility.

In 1911, the tidelands of the San Diego Harbor had been granted by the State of California to the City of San Diego on the condition that the city expend \$1 million for harbor improvements. As part of those improvements, the bulkhead was established and the harbor dredged. The dredging materials were placed behind the bulkhead to fill in submerged tidelands, which eventually became the CAC property.

By that time, the discussion of a civic center had fallen by the wayside. Nolen's report in 1926 took into account the new developments, recommending that:

The best practical solution can be found in using the tide lands site between Atlantic Avenue [now Pacific Highway] and Harbor Drive as the Civic Center for San Diego. There is great distinction in such a site, and if properly worked out, the result cannot fail to be gratifying in many particulars. The disadvantages that attach to inharmonious surroundings can, by careful planning and control, be gradually overcome.<sup>6</sup>

Nolen envisioned the Civic Center as the cornerstone of a grouping of public buildings on the San Diego waterfront; the center would serve as the western anchor of a grand promenade that would link the bay with Balboa Park. His plan helped secure the City's support of the site on the waterfront, and it was officially listed for the first time on March 8, 1926,

when the city plan was adopted. A year later, citizens were given a choice between a site near the courthouse and the waterfront site in an election held on March 22, 1927. The majority of the voters approved the waterfront location.

Yet this was merely the beginning of a long series of decisions regarding site location. The majority in the March election was very slight, and by no means was a final decision within sight. By April, the County had already altered its position, ordaining that "a public building for County and Municipal purposes be constructed, erected and owned jointly by the County of San Diego and the City of San Diego on the site known as the County Courthouse site."<sup>7</sup> One month later, the City followed the County's lead with an ordinance adopting the courthouse site.

This drive for the courthouse location proved to be short-lived; by 1928 both County and City once again favored the



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*The old County Courthouse (as pictured in 1915).*

tidelands plan, and attempts were made to finalize the choice. A bill introduced into the state legislature and signed by the governor on June 11, 1929, provided that the land, owned by the state of California, was to be granted to the County of San Diego and City of San Diego as joint owners. Specifically, the legislation stated that the property be used for municipal purposes—such as erecting and maintaining county and city buildings upon that land—with payment of a sum of \$1,000 to the state of California.<sup>8</sup>

A bond election was held in 1930 to approve funding for construction on the tidelands site. The ballot measure failed to obtain the necessary two-thirds majority vote. In October 1931, with support from both the Board of Supervisors and the City Council, a Joint City and County Building Committee set out to “take into consideration any other site, in the City of San Diego which might be available for the purpose of a civic building.”<sup>9</sup> This opened up the question of location again and, as before, the decision was turned around entirely.



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*San Diego Harbor as the dredging project began.*

In 1932, a committee appointed by the Board of Supervisors suggested that “a building be constructed on the unoccupied portion of the Court House Block,”<sup>10</sup> leading the City and County administrations to adopt that sentiment as well. The Board of Supervisors endorsed the courthouse location because members believed that separating administrative and judicial departments would result in a “less economic and less efficient administration of justice in San Diego County and would be detrimental to the interests of the citizens of San Diego County.”<sup>11</sup>

Yet even this decision lacked finality. The joint committee researched numerous suggestions for potential sites, investigating the seven most viable. They set up rules for site selection, including being located on the fringe of, but not in the heart of, the high-value business district.

The three most feasible sights were described in *A Civic Center Report* submitted in August 1933. Excerpts read:

(A) **COURTHOUSE SITE.** This property has long been occupied by the San Diego County Courthouse. It is located between Broadway and “C” Street

from Front to Union Street. It is limited in size. . . If it were to be incorporated in a Civic Center plan, it would be necessary to acquire at least four city blocks.

This necessity of acquiring additional land, at heavy expense, is considered a most serious objection to this site.

(B) **THE BALBOA PARK SITE, SIXTH AVENUE & DATE STREET.** This site received careful study, since its use for Civic Center purposes has been advocated by many people.

It has the advantage of comparative nearness to the downtown business district.

Analyzed exhaustively, the site presents serious defects. Steep topography would make construction of a harmonious group of buildings difficult. The cost of grading would be heavy, parking facilities would be inadequate, and there would be scant room for future expansion.

(C) **THE WATERFRONT SITE.** This site, chosen by John Nolen, eminent City Planner, comprises about eighteen acres of land on San Diego Bay, from Ash Street to Grape Street and from Atlantic Street to Harbor Street on the bayfront. There is ample space here to provide for a magnificent group of public buildings, each one of which will enhance the appearance of the others, with ample facilities for parking and expansion.

This area is available now for building without further legislation, and, in the words of the City Attorney in a recent opinion, “It appears that no impediment exists to the erection on this site by the City and County of such public buildings as they may desire.”<sup>12</sup>

The joint committee contended that the waterfront site was the best possible location. Of the three, it came nearest to fulfilling the committee’s own rules for site selection, which included a location on the fringe of, but not in the heart of, the high-value business district. This report played a large part in the final decision of City and County administrative bodies.

While some of the opposition to the waterfront site came from citizens who felt that the alternate locations offered a more logical choice, others were concerned about potential hazards. Elmer G. Johnson, representing a group of public employees, stated:

“To build a civic center on water-soaked, filled-in tideland, amid railroad tracks, shipping, fish canneries, sea gulls, and unpleasant bay odors and dampness, where women and girls will have to pass through tough parts of town (r.r. yards, shipping and warehouse districts,) (8 murders not accounted for,) is not a very pleasant prospect. Public employees should vote AGAINST the civic center on the tidelands.”<sup>13</sup>

In addition to these concerns, many citizens viewed the waterfront site as a “perilous location” because of the height of the building and its proximity to the flight path of Lindbergh Field. Protests of the site went so far as to demand legal attention (see Entitlement Challenged section).



# Securing the waterfront site

One strength of the waterfront proposal was its many prominent supporters. *The San Diego Union*, the Citizen's Civic Center Committee, the San Diego Chamber of Commerce and influential citizens such as George Marston all supported the project.

The *Union* blatantly expressed its support of the site in a series of editorials published in 1933. A December 15 editorial made the following arguments to reinforce the newspaper's position: (1) the site was given to the city of San Diego for the purpose of building a civic center; (2) loans from the federal government would come only if it were demonstrated that there was a consistent, planned development; (3) the tideland was the only available site large enough for a civic center; and (4) the harbor site was recommended by one of the world's leading city planners (John Nolen).<sup>14</sup>



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*An aerial view of the future home of the Civic Center.*

## The San Diego Union

Wednesday, October 24, 1933

### Shall We Build? Or Quit?

THE PEOPLE OF SAN DIEGO have had the courage and foresight and good sense to approve the Nolen plan of city development. They have displayed those constructive qualities in voting for the harborfront location for the civic center—the unique and outstanding feature of the city plan they adopted. The question today is merely whether they will vote the money to go ahead with the project they have undertaken, or whether they will back down and permit the city's growth to progress at haphazard for another two years or so.

Nothing is less relevant to the issue than the desultory talk and the endless counterpropositions dealing with other possible sites for the civic center.

There is one and only one site under consideration now. It is the site suggested by the nation's most eminent city planner, Mr. John Nolen, situated on the harbor esplanade that is also a feature of his plan, looking out over the harbor that is the city's characteristic, valuable and most beautiful single possession. It is the site already approved by popular vote.

The question is whether we shall appropriate money to develop this site, to obtain the civic buildings so sorely needed—and to finance this construction at a time when new building can be done most economically and with the best general effect on the community.

If the people of San Diego wish now to re-open the whole question of possible civic-center sites, it is their privilege to do so. But to do it would be to discard all past progress, to abandon the consistency and sense of direction that comes of planned development, and to abandon all hope of actual construction for many years to come.

If we are to go back to the business of suggesting possible sites to each other, we shall find enough to keep us busy for a long time—busy, but getting nowhere.

There are some earnest advocates of a site in Balboa Park—Balboa Park is full of sites. For any one that is ever put on a ballot, there are half a dozen waiting to be exploited by earnest insurgents. In the letters appearing in one page of *The Union* on one day, Balboa Park—exact location not specified, in most instances—Old Town, Golden Hill, Twenty-first and J streets, lower Broadway and upper Broadway were suggested as potential civic center sites. The city is full of possible locations. Any spot between the new State college and the Coronado ferry slip will find its advocates.

It is not an unfair restriction—it is a great mercy and a blessing—that these alternatives are not up for consideration on Tuesday's ballot.

The one question before us next Tuesday is whether we shall go ahead or whether we shall quit.

Shall we undertake to build our new civic center, or shall we abandon all plans of actual construction and go back to arguing!

The proponents succeeded in influencing both City and County administration. In October 1933, the County Board of Supervisors resolved that the courthouse site was “now wholly and entirely inadequate and insufficient” to house the administration building. On December 19, citizens reaffirmed that sentiment by voting for a second time to have the Civic Center constructed on the tideland site rather than the courthouse or park sites. With the support of the voters backing the decision, the location was secured on March 25, 1935, when the Board of Supervisors passed a resolution stating:

If the County of San Diego and the City of San Diego erect a joint building for County and municipal purposes, that then and in that event said building should be located and constructed upon that certain parcel of land described as that portion of the tidelands of the City of San Diego, lying between Ash and Grape Streets, and Atlantic and Harbor Streets, in the City of San Diego, a more particular description of which may be found in Chapter 778 of Statutes of 1929 of the State of California.<sup>15</sup>

From this point forward, the question of where the Civic Center was to be located was no longer an issue at the administrative level. The attention previously devoted to the location of the building was redirected towards finding a successful means of financing its construction.

*Left: One of the four editorials published in The San Diego Union in favor of the waterfront site. Text reprinted with the permission of The San Diego Union-Tribune.*

# Entitlement challenged

While the waterfront site had many influential supporters, it also had its share of opponents. A 1934 lawsuit made its way to the State Supreme Court that sought to prevent construction on the tidelands site.

The case named City and County auditors, Chauncey R. Hammond and G. Frederick Waterbury, as defendants because they were responsible for carrying out the Board and City Council ordinances that approved transferring funds to the state to purchase the land. Under the 1929 legislation—which set the waterfront site aside for Civic Center purposes—the

ing on the tidelands site. Justice C.N. Andrews complied by granting a temporary restraining order, which prevented the payment of funds.<sup>16</sup>

The tidelands opponents jumped at this chance to criticize the harborfront site decision. One citizen of San Diego, Donald MacArthur, maintained a favorable judgement in the suit would relieve the City and County “from the disgrace of having a Civic Center built by the freight yards and the cream of our harbor industrial lands taken for an alien purpose.” The case was seen by some as an opportunity to rectify the decision of the governing bodies; proponents of other sites grew hopeful that the administration would be forced to reconsider their choice.

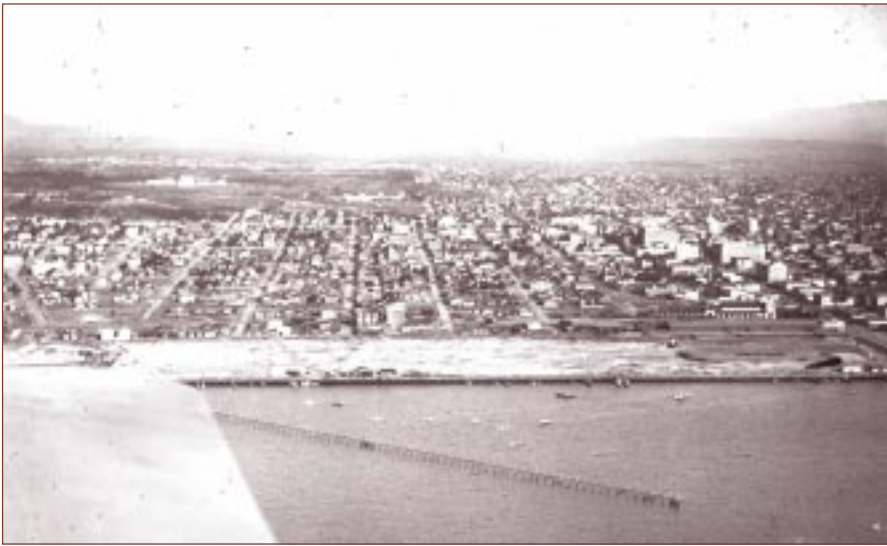
The suit also prolonged the process of securing funding for the planning stages. Civic Center planning was to be financed in part by the State Emergency Relief Administration (SERA). Citizens expressed concern that SERA funds would be wasted on plans for a site that wouldn’t be approved during an era when funding appropriations were in high demand. One letter sent in protest to SERA stated:

“On behalf of thousands of our fellow-citizens, we wish to enter a strong protest against any such SERA financial appropriations or work assignment, for the following valid reason:

“As you will note from the enclosed Transcript on Appeal to the Supreme Court of the State of California, said court is being asked for a permanent injunction to restrain the City and/or County of San Diego from using the so-called tidelands site for municipal and/or county purposes.

“Our attorneys firmly believe that the Supreme Court will grant this permanent injunction, which naturally would nullify any and all work the SERA may be asked to undertake in this connection.”<sup>17</sup>

But despite the strength of conviction of those opposed to the tidelands site, the case was dismissed because the California Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the 1929 legislation that provided for the transfer of the land. Since the harbor dredging, the property in question no longer retained water frontage. The legislature said that the property was, by the harbor improvements, “cut off from access to navigable waters, and is no longer required for navigation, commerce or the fisheries.”<sup>18</sup> The property had been declared free from the tidelands trust and conveyed to the County and City “to be used only for county and municipal purposes, including the erection and maintenance thereon of county and municipal buildings.”



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*A dispute over the tidelands site made its way to California's State Supreme Court.*

County and City had five years to pay for the land. If the lawsuit was settled in favor of the plaintiff, it would prevent the transfer of funds, and the land would remain under the ownership of the state.

In *Frank E. Atwood v Chauncey R. Hammond*, the plaintiff claimed that Chapter 778 of the Statutes of 1929, which set the land of the waterfront site aside for Civic Center purposes, violated Chapter 700 of the Statutes of 1911. At that time, the land had been “conveyed” to the City of San Diego, to be used for navigation, commerce and fishing. Although San Diego had permission to make improvements, such as railroads or piers, they did not have the right to transfer title of the tidelands. The plaintiff contended that the land belonged to the United States government and that the state of California had no authority to convey that property to “any person or corporation, municipal or otherwise,” and whoever held the land became charged with the obligation to make all the improvements in trust for navigation, commerce and fishing. According to the suit, constructing a building on that land would not fit into those specifications.

The appeal to the State Supreme Court asked for a permanent injunction to restrain the City and County from build-

# Applying for aid

The public may have been in full support of the Civic Center idea, but they were far from ready to spend taxpayer money to develop the site. The special election in 1930 proposed issuing \$500,000 in bonds to pay for half the cost of the building, but did not receive the two-thirds majority needed to pass. This fiscal caution among voters most likely was the result of the state of the economy, as the nation was plunging into the Great Depression.

In 1932, the Civic Center Committee pointed out that “financial conditions have so changed throughout the country, as to cause considerable alarm, and at the present time it is very difficult, if not impossible, to sell bonds backed by the best of security.”<sup>19</sup>

Recalling the fiscal deadlock, architect Samuel W. Hamill, who later became chief designer for the project, reflected that “discouraged committeemen and officials saw the Civic Center development facing an impasse that seemed insurmountable. The community refused to vote funds, and further progress seemed at a standstill.”<sup>20</sup>

Since taxpayers were unwilling to allocate local funds, the federal government seemed to be the only viable alternative. The passage of the National Recovery Act in 1933 sparked



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*With the Depression at hand, San Diegans were unwilling to pass a bond measure to pay for the Civic Center.*

hope that the federal government might be interested in partially funding construction. In June of 1933, City Attorney C.L. Byers informed the Board of Supervisors that:

“It appears that neither the City nor the County has available any bonds or funds with which to participate in the erection of such a building [Civic Center]; nor is either in a position to agree at this time to repay any funds spent in its erection; that the only advisable procedure for securing the erection of such a building is to apply to the President’s Emergency Administrator of Public Works, under the provisions of the National Recovery Act.”<sup>21</sup>

To secure the funding, the City and County had to apply to the Federal Emergency Administration and present a convincing argument that the Civic Center qualified as a Public Works Project. The Federal Public Works Administration policy was to approve only projects that were part of a comprehensive community development plan and the application required architectural plans to be drawn up for the building site before appropriations would be considered. At this point the chairman of the State Relief Commission, Ralph E. Jenney, assumed the responsibility of communicating between the City, the County, and the federal government. When Jenney requested a loan application, he was told funds were already depleted and applications were not being accepted, but there was a good chance that additional funds would be appropriated for Public Works. The Federal Emergency Administration expressed that:

A city or county building is, in our opinion, an ideal type of project, fulfilling requirements as to economic and social desirability and putting to work men in the building trades who have been very badly hit by the Depression.

I can assure you that if we do receive additional funds, we would be glad to entertain an application from San Diego for such buildings.<sup>22</sup>



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*Plans had to be drawn up for the Civic Center before San Diego could be considered for WPA funding.*



Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes had earlier provided some reassurance stating that the federal government would support projects such as the Civic Center because of its size, the employment opportunities it would offer, and the long-range benefits it would provide for the community.<sup>23</sup> T.C. MacCauley, a member of the County Planning Commission, and others involved in generating the committee Civic Center Report appeared before the Board of Supervisors and remarked that in all probability the federal government would approve their application.

As soon as funding became available, the Civic Center application was completed and sent to the Works Progress Administration. City and County officials collectively held their breath as they awaited the results.

At first the federal government turned over only enough money to pay for architectural drawings of the proposed Center. Then Jenney, who reportedly was personally acquainted with the President Franklin D. Roosevelt, went to Washington, D.C. to confer with government officials regarding four

different applications he was representing.<sup>24</sup> Jenney's persistence was fruitful, for just one week after the president personally toured the site and a mere month after the City and County filed the application for the project, Roosevelt approved nearly \$1 million in start-up funds in October 1935.<sup>25</sup>

Federal funding was formally authorized for the Civic Center in late November. The state WPA director Frank Y. McLaughlin announced that the San Diego Civic Center project had been approved, and the federal contribution of \$989,528 was in a bank in San Francisco ready for the district director of WPA to use. The remainder of the cost was to be borne in equal amounts of \$250,000 by the City and the County of San Diego.<sup>26</sup> McLaughlin commented, "I have taken more interest in this San Diego project than any other in the state of California," and he urged the architects working on the project to expedite their work so that the actual construction of the building would get under way.

## Planning for the future

The Federal Government is contemplating the appropriation of funds for an extensive plan for the construction of large public buildings. It was the consensus of opinion of the members of the Board that in the event such funds are released, complete plans and specifications should be in readiness in order that an application may be made for funds for the construction of the Civic Center.<sup>27</sup>

In order to complete the WPA application, San Diego City and County officials needed to have plans and specifications drawn up. Three San Diego architects—William Templeton Johnson, Richard S. Requa, and Louis J. Gill—offered their professional services to supervise draftsmen in the early stages of architectural planning. During the summer of 1934, the City and County appropriated funds to finance the Civic Center project plans prepared by 30 draftsmen and engineers. The chief architects were paid a total of \$36,000 of Works Progress Administration funding for their completed architectural plans.

The Board of Supervisors then requested the appointment of a Design Committee consisting of members of the San Diego chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA). The AIA considered holding a competition for membership on the committee, but eventually abandoned Nolen's idea of a "national competition" in order to prevent an outsider (non-San Diegan) from winning. They chose instead to have an internal vote to fill the positions. The AIA selected the three architects already familiar with the project (Johnson, Requa, Gill) and Samuel Hamill. Jenney placed Hamill in charge of the Design Office for the building because Requa was occupied with the 1935 World's Fair Exposition, Johnson



*Civic Center architects William Templeton Johnson, Richard S. Requa, Louis J. Gill and Samuel Hamill. (Photos courtesy of the San Diego Historical Society and Georgette Hamill Serrano.)*

(the originally-selected architect) was ill, and Gill preferred to work with the bookkeeping of the office.

Jess Stanton, an architect from Chicago and an executive of the Gladding-McBean Tile Company, designed the delicate inlaid tile work on the Civic Center. Hamill gave credit to Stanton as one of the most important contributors to the project.

Requa, Gill and Johnson appeared before the Board of Supervisors in early 1935 with a model of the proposed Civic Center. The model was then displayed at the World's Fair Exposition held in San Diego from 1935-1936 accompanied by Requa and Johnson, who were architectural consultants



for the Exposition. After noting a positive response to the model, the Board requested that the committee of architects submit an estimate of the cost of preparing Civic Center plans. A State Emergency Relief Administration grant (# 38-A1-30) funded the preparation of plans, estimates and models of the Civic Center. The City of San Diego sponsored the project and the City and County appropriated money for the necessary supervision. SERA commissioned sketches of the Civic Center, which had been completed earlier by French architect George Palliser. Hamill later credited Palliser as the "the chief designer of the original layout."<sup>28</sup>

Design work alone took more than a year to complete. In 1936, jurisdiction of the site had been released to the federal government under the Works Progress Administration and National Unemployment Relief Program. As a result, the fed-

eral government was in complete control of the hiring and discharging of employees, the regulation of working hours and work conditions, and the actual construction of the building. The City and County shared joint obligations to furnish plans, specifications and architectural drawings, together with monies or materials amounting to one-tenth of the total cost, or approximately \$100,000.<sup>29</sup> Except for the foundation of the City-County building, which was to be built mostly by common labor under a WPA force account, construction of the building was to be done by contract. This was customary for public work projects, with the prevailing wage scale paid to all skilled workmen.<sup>30</sup> Ralph Jenney quickly arranged for office space to accommodate 100 workers in a vacant building in Balboa Park, and at this point the planning stages of Civic Center construction were well under way.

## Civic Center design approval



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*This model shows the original tower design, which was later modified to accommodate the building's proximity to Lindbergh Field.*

After considering the original Nolen Plan for city development along with several other alternatives, a modified Spanish Colonial style with ornamentation of gold and azure tiles was chosen for the Civic Center.<sup>31</sup> During the design phase, the Spanish Renaissance motif originally favored by the architects had given way to the sleeker moderne style popular in the 1930s.<sup>32</sup>

The design of the central tower was revised several times during planning; architects originally envisioned a soaring 225-foot elevation, which proved unfeasible due to cost and the proximity to Lindbergh Field. Rueben Fleet, manager of Consolidated Aircraft, threatened to sue the City because the tower would interfere with landings at his airfield. Because of this, the tower design was modified to rise just 150 feet.

The original building design included the extension of

wings to the east and west, forming an "H" configuration when viewed from above, yet the final design included only two wings. Original plans also called for a service building, state office building, hall of justice, civic auditorium and health services building; but due to conflicts between the City and County governments, it was decided not to proceed with the additional buildings at that time.

Toward the close of 1935 everything had fallen into place to begin construction on the new Civic Center. When Works Progress Administrator Frank McLaughlin sent written authorization, his telegram stated: "This wire will be your authority to proceed at once in the most expeditious manner possible with the work on the Civic Center project."<sup>33</sup>

Finally, after close to two decades of planning, the building process could finally begin.